On 12th November 2017, the European Democracy Lab and La République en Marche jointly organized the Berlin Round Table on Europe. The speakers Dr. Ulrike Guérot (European Democracy Lab), Daphne Büllesbach (European Alternatives) and Florian Günther (Stand up for Europe) discussed how Germany could be encouraged to play an active part in the EU reforms proposed by French president Emmanuel Macron.

With regard to the main question of this round table, two important distinctions must be made.

First, we need to ask: Who is “Germany”? There are at least four different “Germanies” or four relevant levels at which we must focus our mobilisation efforts: the political elite, the (leading) media, the organised civil society and the ordinary citizens.

As far as the political elite and the media are concerned, there is indeed a strong tendency to reduce European issues to the one and only question: “What’s in it for us?” or in other words: “What does it cost us?”, as occurred a few days after the election of Emmanuel Macron when some German newspapers and magazines (e.g. FAZ, Der Spiegel) suggested Germany would have to pay for Macron’s blueprint for reforming the EU. There is reason to doubt whether the German political elite and media can be persuaded to change their attitude towards Europe without significant pressure from the bottom, that is, from civil society and citizens.

The organised civil society, which was widely represented at the Round Table, is largely supportive of Macron’s proposals for a democratisation of EU institutions. One issue that finds unanimous support is the introduction of transnational lists for the European elections in 2019. The participating organisations are prepared to play an active part in mobilising German civil society.

Finally, there are the ordinary citizens. Though Germany has certainly enjoyed a privileged position in Europe over the last decade, not all Germans can be said to have benefitted from it. Many have been hit by the financial crisis and austerity policy, tough to a lesser degree than fellow Europeans in Southern Europe or elsewhere. There is consensus that momentum for a reform of the EU must be as inclusive as possible.

Second, when it comes to mobilising people, there is a distinction to be made between two different types of mobilisation, which are both important, but they may not be equally relevant: emotional and political mobilisation.

Emotional mobilisation aims at raising awareness of the benefits of European integration and our common identity as Europeans. This can be achieved through culture, public relations or demonstrations. In this regard, Pulse of Europe has been successful by using social media. However, the lack of a clear goal beyond preserving what has been achieved proves to be a serious limitation of this kind of mobilisation.

Political mobilisation aims at raising awareness of the benefits of European integration and our common identity as Europeans. This can be achieved through culture, public relations or demonstrations. In this regard, Pulse of Europe has been successful by using social media. However, the lack of a clear goal beyond preserving what has been achieved proves to be a serious limitation of this kind of mobilisation.

At the intersection of emotional and political mobilisation, European Alternatives has a strong cultural focus and achieves to bring together thousands of Europeans every year in a variety of projects, of which some produce convincing output for for more inclusive integration and transnational cooperation.

This is where political mobilisation comes into play. Whereas emotional mobilisation is about who we are as Europeans and what our common values are, the political question par excellence is: How to live together? And, as was rightly said in the discussion, political mobilisation is about rights and institutions, and more precisely institutionalising rights. What is most needed here is a sense of ownership for a political project consisting in claiming rights and building institutions to ensure them. People must understand that European integration is not something happening far away and over their heads in Brussels or elsewhere. Political mobilisation can be best achieved by starting a new constitutional process which is basically open to every citizen und genuinely transnatioanal in scope.

Having made these distinctions, one can reflect on the actions to be taken. For now, at least three concrete steps can be taken to foster political mobilisation for Europe:

- Signing the petition “Bundestag Go European!” (https://machs-europaeisch.eu/de/) which is to be lodged with the Bundestag, in order to initiate a debate on the democratisation of the EU, in the Bundestag and beyond.
- Organising democratic conventions as proposed by Emmanuel Macron on several occasions (at the Humboldt University in Berlin in January 2017, in Athens and at the Sorbonne University in September 2017).
- Setting up transnational lists and parties to run for the next European Parliament election in 2019, as intended by DIEM25 and VOX.

There is a chance and there is risk in this political process involving citizens. The chance is that ordinary citizens are less conservative than their governments and more pro-European than they are commonly assumed to be. The risk is that they refuse the prospect of a more progressive and more integrated Europe, that is, that they want another or less Europe than we do. Let’s take the bet that the challenge is worth it. After all, arguing about politics is what democracy is all about.